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St. Dominic Hospital eyes Madison County

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MADISON — St. Dominic Hospital, in its proposal to build a \$121.6 million hospital in Madison County, says there are not enough beds to care for the growing population in the county.

A Mississippi Department of Health hearing in February will determine whether the hospital can proceed with construction. However, the Health Department's staff in March recommended against the proposal.

"The hospital is deemed a new hospital," Rachel Pittman, chief of health planning and resource development at the Health Department, wrote The Clarion-Ledger in an e-mail. "The (State Health Plan) does not show a need for another hospital in the area."

This is the hospital's third attempt to open a facility in the county, which has one hospital in Canton.

"(Our goal is) to give Madison County people a choice of high-quality health care," said Sister Mary Dorothea Sondgeroth, president of St. Dominic Health Services.

HMA, which operates five hospitals in the metro area, opposes St. Dominic plan. The company recent-

ly broke ground on \$42-million, 67-bed hospital scheduled to open in 2011 across from the Nissan plant in Canton. St. Dominic opposed HMA's efforts to relocate Madison Medical Center within Canton.

"St. Dominic opposed that new hospital all the way to the Mississippi Supreme Court," Davis Richards, interim CEO of Madison County Medical Center, said in a statement. "They lost, but their opposition delayed Madison County's new hospital by several years."

"Our new hospital will serve everyone in Madison County and its surrounding area as well, which is what we believe a hospital's mission is supposed to be," Richards said.

Madison's population has grown nearly 70 percent since 1990 - to an estimated 91,369 this year - and is expected to continue growing.

"One hospital in Canton, Miss., with 67 beds just is not enough right now to meet the growing health care needs of a developing and growing county like Madison County," said Lester Diamond, executive vice president at St. Dominic Health Services.

Madison resident and heart attack survivor Bill Brame is one of those people and supports bringing a hospital to southern Madison County.

"If a hospital is willing to put up the money and

provide the services, why would anyone be against that?" he said.

It took 27 minutes for him to get to Baptist Hospital in Jackson, where he was treated in 2007, he said.

"That doesn't seem long unless you are in a situation like me, where after six minutes of no oxygen to the brain you start losing brain cells," Brame said.

The hospital wants Brame and other supporters to inform the Health Department of the need and has created a Web site detailing the project.

St. Dominic wants to relocate 71 beds, which would include intensive care, labor and delivery rooms, from the Jackson campus to create a hospital and medical office building off Interstate 55. The hospital also would provide emergency room services.

If approved, hospital officials say the facility would bring 350 jobs, plus additional workers in the adjoining medical office building. St. Dominic executives said the new hospital would allow the Jackson campus to expand some of its services and the company would invest \$150 million in the Jackson campus over the next 10 years.

The project would take about 18 months to 2 years to build, requiring 450 construction jobs.

St. Dominic has secured about 440 acres for the hospital and future development.